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13 March 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: Presidential Briefing Coordinator

FROM:
National Intelligence Officer for China

SUBJECT: Presidential Briefing on the Horn of Africa

China and Eritrea/Ethiopia

1. Chinese support to the Eritrean liberation groups ended about the time of Haile Selassie's visit to Peking in 1972. Since then, representatives of ELF/PLF have attempted to regain Chinese support through contacts with Chinese diplomats in the Sudan. So far, these Eritrean approaches have been unsuccessful.

2. Risks outweigh the benefits that would be involved in Chinese support to the Eritreans:

-- An independent Eritrea might reduce the potential for Soviet influence in the Red Sea region,

-- however, Chinese support for Eritrean independence would be at cross-purposes with the OAU policy of inviolable borders.

-- The Chinese are still trying to maintain relations with Addis Ababa despite the Soviet and Cuban presence and some Ethiopian slights.

-- International support and Eritrean internal strength are not great enough to give China reasonable confidence that its involvement would succeed in the face of rival Soviet efforts. Peking would not want to risk an embarrassing defeat.

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3. Peking has reportedly cultivated members of the proscribed Ethiopian Popular Revolutionary Party in Addis Ababa. There have been rumors of some sort of Chinese assistance to this Party, but they are unsubstantiated. The Party is extremely small, however the Chinese may feel that it is useful to develop contacts with these activists in the event the Military Council collapses.



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